

TALKING POINTS FOR ADDI BRIEFING OF HPSCI  
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INDO-SRI LANKAN HUMANITARIAN AID CRISIS

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India's decision to airlift humanitarian relief supplies to Sri Lankan Tamils last Thursday drove ties with Colombo to their lowest point in years, but the threat of an immediate confrontation between the two is receding slowly.

--Colombo has officially protested the Indian move and is seeking international condemnation--from the US, the United Nations, and regional neighbors--but it also suggested Friday that the two governments hold discussions on ways to deliver additional Indian aid contributions.

--Indian officials expressed remorse over damaged relations between the two, and proposed holding bilateral talks with Colombo during the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Foreign Minister's meeting next week,

President Jayewardene will come under increasing pressure from domestic Sinhalese opposition groups to continue military operations against the rebels, and the second stage of the major military offensive begun late last month is likely to resume once this crisis subsides.

--Sinhalese hardliners may criticize the government for allowing India to tread unceremoniously on Sri Lankan sovereignty and will encourage Jayewardene not to let India dictate how to handle internal concerns.

--The Sri Lankan army conducted a limited military operation in the Jaffna Peninsula Saturday in an apparent effort to consolidate territorial gains made late last month in insurgent-controlled areas.

Indian naval deployments and comments by senior Indian officials suggest New Delhi is making contingency preparations for military action--from a show of force to actual intervention--to respond to further Sri Lankan military activity against the Tamils.

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--At least five of the warships are at Madras--a likely staging area for Indian operations against Sri Lanka--but so far we have not seen the amphibious craft at Madras nor the troops there out of garrison.

Gandhi almost certainly saw the airlift as a low-risk opportunity to maintain Indian credibility in the crisis--following the earlier unsuccessful attempt to deliver the supplies by ship--and to improve his political standing after several months of strong domestic criticism.

--He probably believes such dramatic actions on behalf of Hindus in Sri Lanka will help win over Indian Hindus before critical elections next week in Haryana state.

--The airlift underscores Gandhi's exasperation with what he believes is Jayewardene's intransigent attitude during several rounds of Indian-brokered peace talks to end the conflict, and probably was designed to indicate New Delhi's willingness to take a firmer hand in pressing for a settlement.